MIKE BARON AND
ED HANNIGAN
ATARI FORCE
16
75¢
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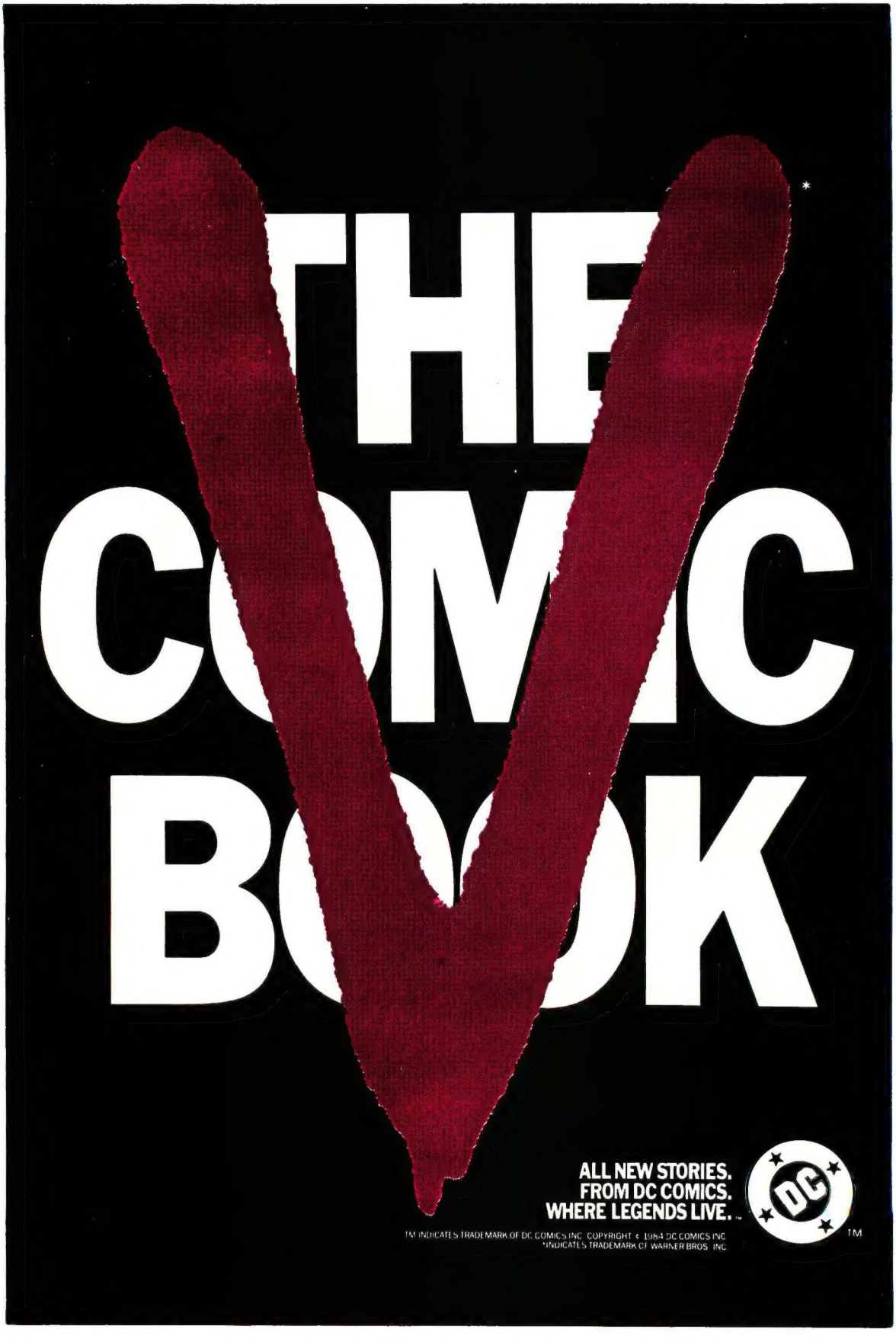
APR. 85
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
ATTACK!
WHERE LEGENDS LIVE!
TAZLINGS!
PARIS CULLINS
GARCIA LOPEZ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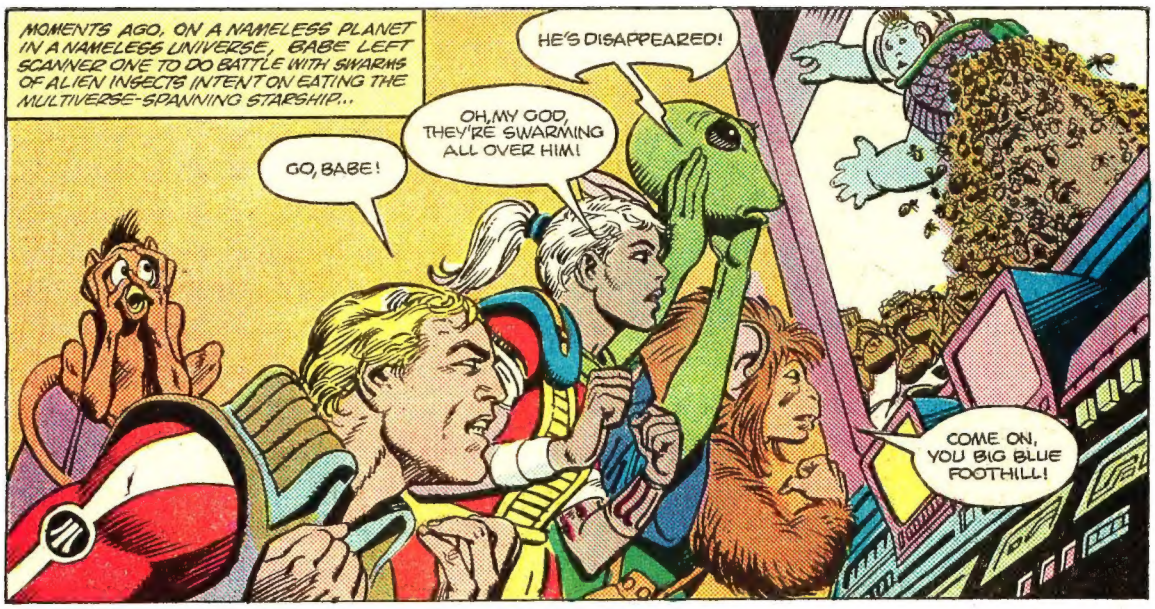
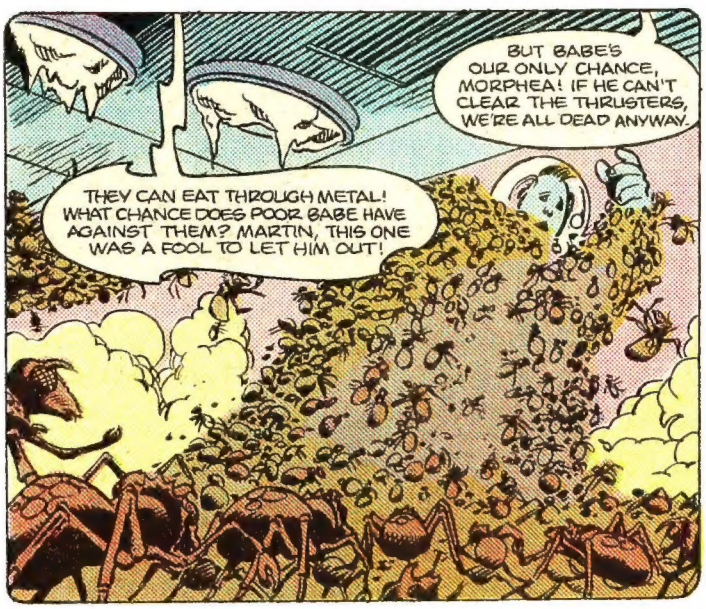
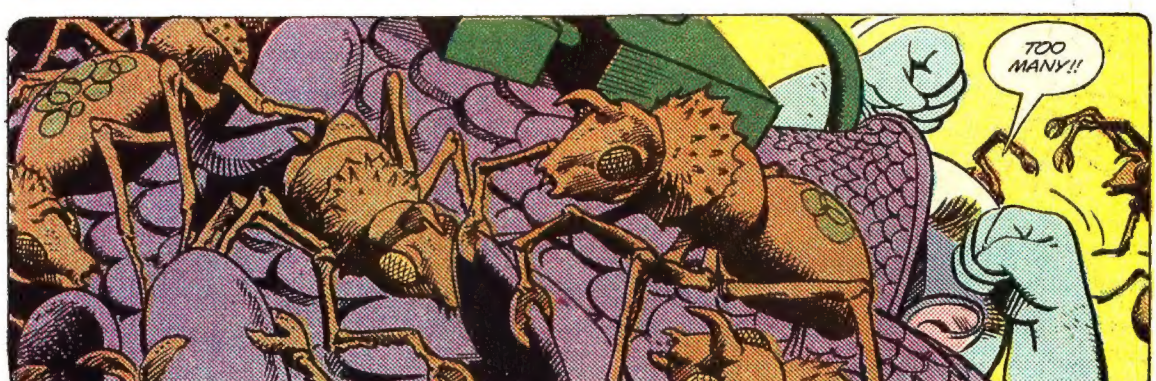

MOMENTS AGO, ON A NAMELESS PLANET IN A NAMELESS UNIVERSE, BABE LEFT SCANNER ONE TO DO BATTLE WITH SWARMS OF ALIEN INSECTS INTENT ON EATING THE MULTIVERSE-SPANNING STARSHIP...
HE'S DISAPPEARED!
OH, MY GOD, THEY'RE SWARMING ALL OVER HIM!
GO, BABE!
COME ON, YOU BIG BLUE FOOTHILL!


BUT BABE'S OUR ONLY CHANCE, MORPHEA! IF HE CAN'T CLEAR THE THRUSTERS, WE'RE ALL DEAD ANYWAY.
THEY CAN EAT THROUGH METAL! WHAT CHANCE DOES POOR BABE HAVE AGAINST THEM? MARTIN, THIS ONE WAS A FOOL TO LET HIM OUT!



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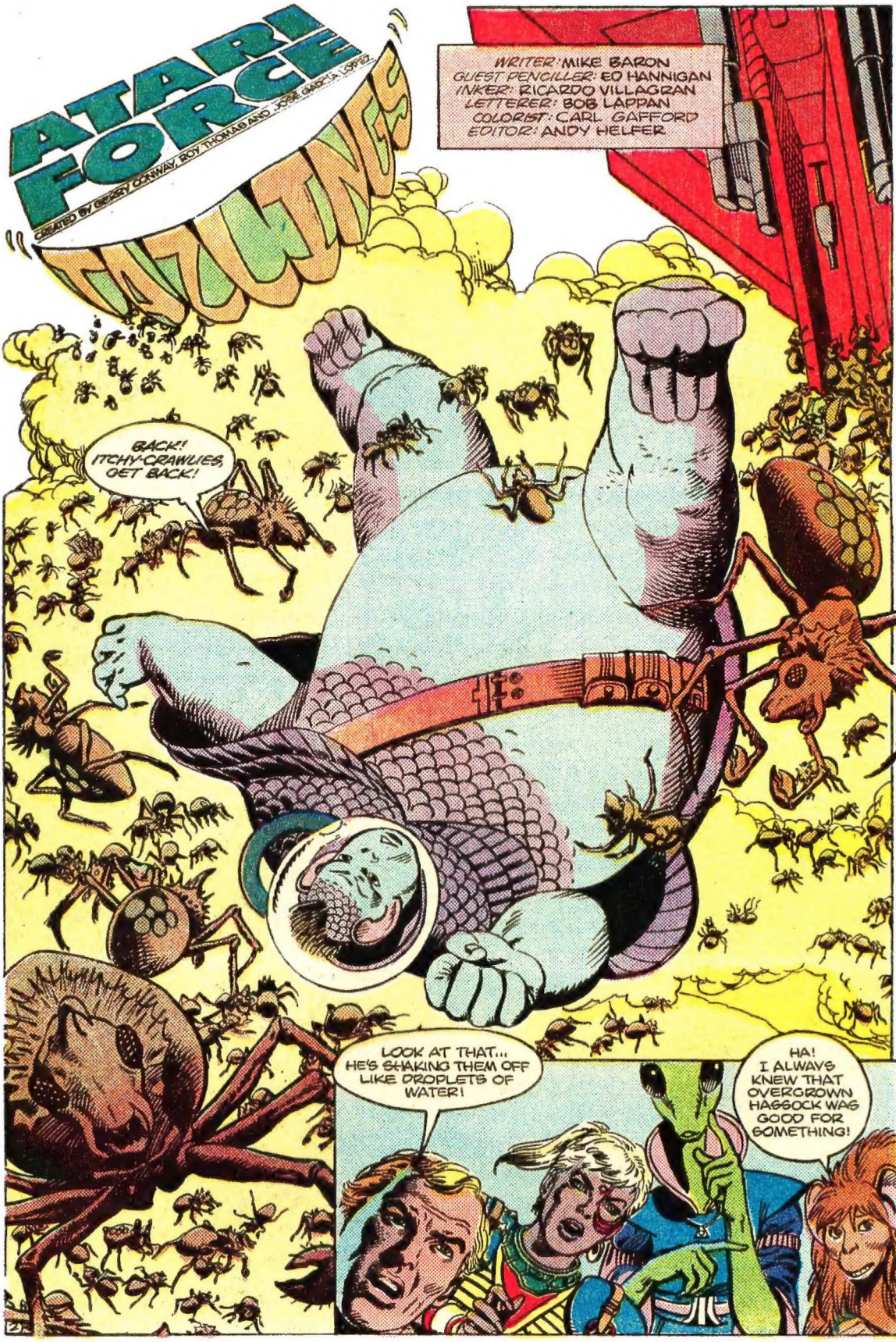
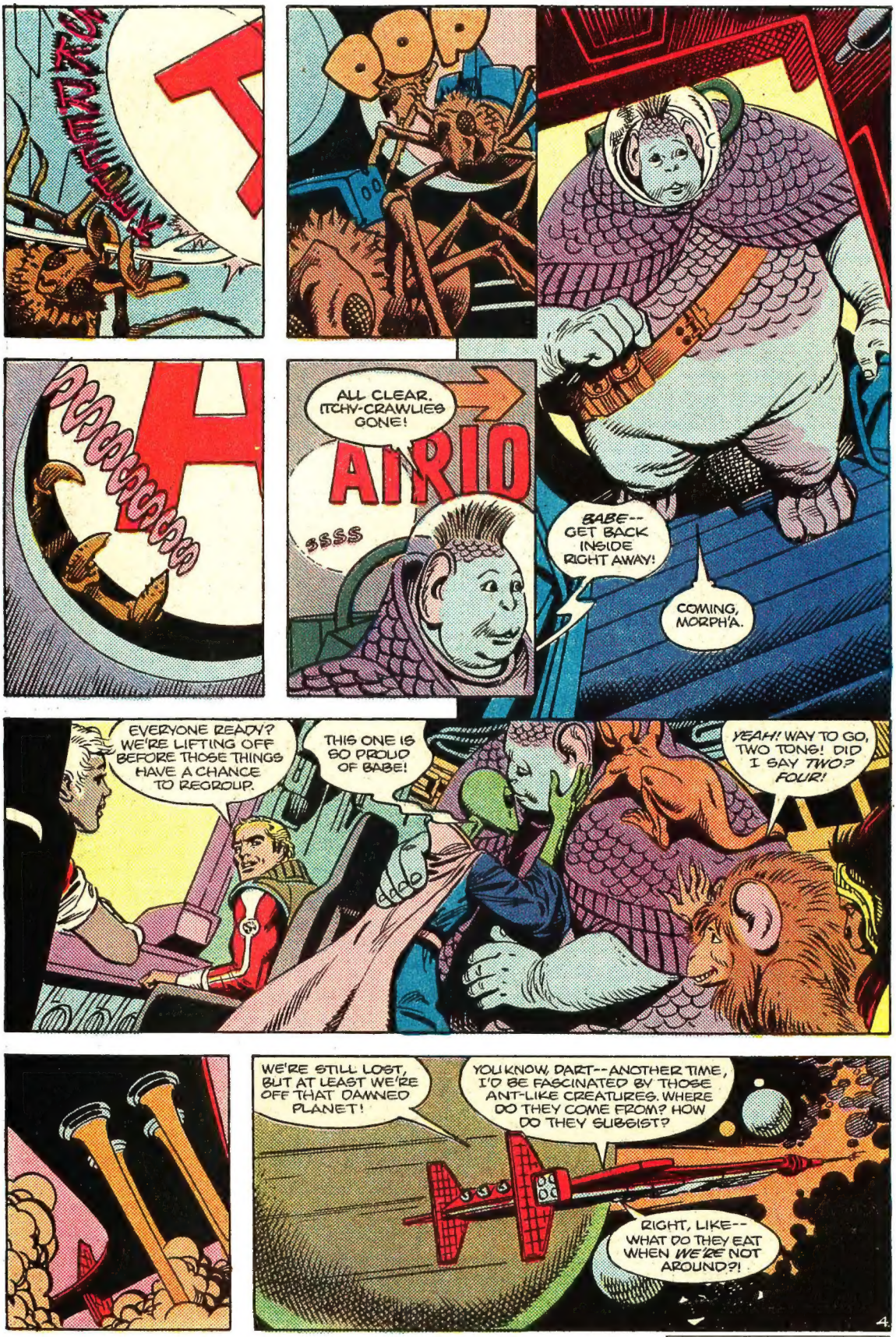

ATARI FORCE
CREATED BY GERRY CONWAY, ROY THOMAS AND JOSE GARCIA LOPEZ
"TIZWIN"
WRITER: MIKE BARON
GUEST PENCILLER: ED HANNIGAN
INKER: RICARDO VILLAGRAN
LETTERER: BOB LAPPAN
COLORIST: CARL GAFFORD
EDITOR: ANDY HELFER
BACK! ITCHY-CRAWLIES, GET BACK!
LOOK AT THAT... HE'S SHAKING THEM OFF LIKE DROPLETS OF WATER!
HA! I ALWAYS KNEW THAT OVERGROWN HAGGOCK WAS GOOD FOR SOMETHING!

BABE IS SORRY, LITTLE ITCHY-CRAWLIES, SORRY.
BUT YOU ALL HAVE TO GET OFF THE SHIP...
HE'S DOING IT! BABE IS PEELING THAT GUNK OFF THE THRUSTER PLATES!
SO MANY CRUSHED... BABE DOESN'T KNOW HIS OWN STRENGTH...
YES, IT SEEMS BABE'S BODY CHEMISTRY IS EXTREMELY TOXIC TO THESE NATIVES.
HA! LOOK AT THOSE BOOGERS RUN! GET 'EM, BABE!
SHUT UP, PAKRAT.
WHILE ALL EYES ARE TRAINED ON BABE'S HEROIC STRUGGLE TO CLEAR THE THRUST PLATES, NO ONE NOTICES A PLATOON OF HIGHLY SPECIALIZED WARRIORS HARD AT WORK ON SCANNER ONE'S STARBOARD FIN.


ALL CLEAR. ITCHY-CRAWLIES GONE!
AIRIO
BABE-- GET BACK INSIDE RIGHT AWAY!
COMING, MORPH'A.
EVERYONE READY? WE'RE LIFTING OFF BEFORE THOSE THINGS HAVE A CHANCE TO REGROUP.
THIS ONE IS SO PROUD OF BABE!
YEAH! WAY TO GO, TWO TONS! DID I SAY TWO? FOUR!
WE'RE STILL LOST, BUT AT LEAST WE'RE OFF THAT DAMNED PLANET!
YOU KNOW, DART--ANOTHER TIME, I'D BE FASCINATED BY THOSE ANT-LIKE CREATURES. WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? HOW DO THEY SUBSIST?
RIGHT, LIKE-- WHAT DO THEY EAT WHEN WE'RE NOT AROUND?!
4

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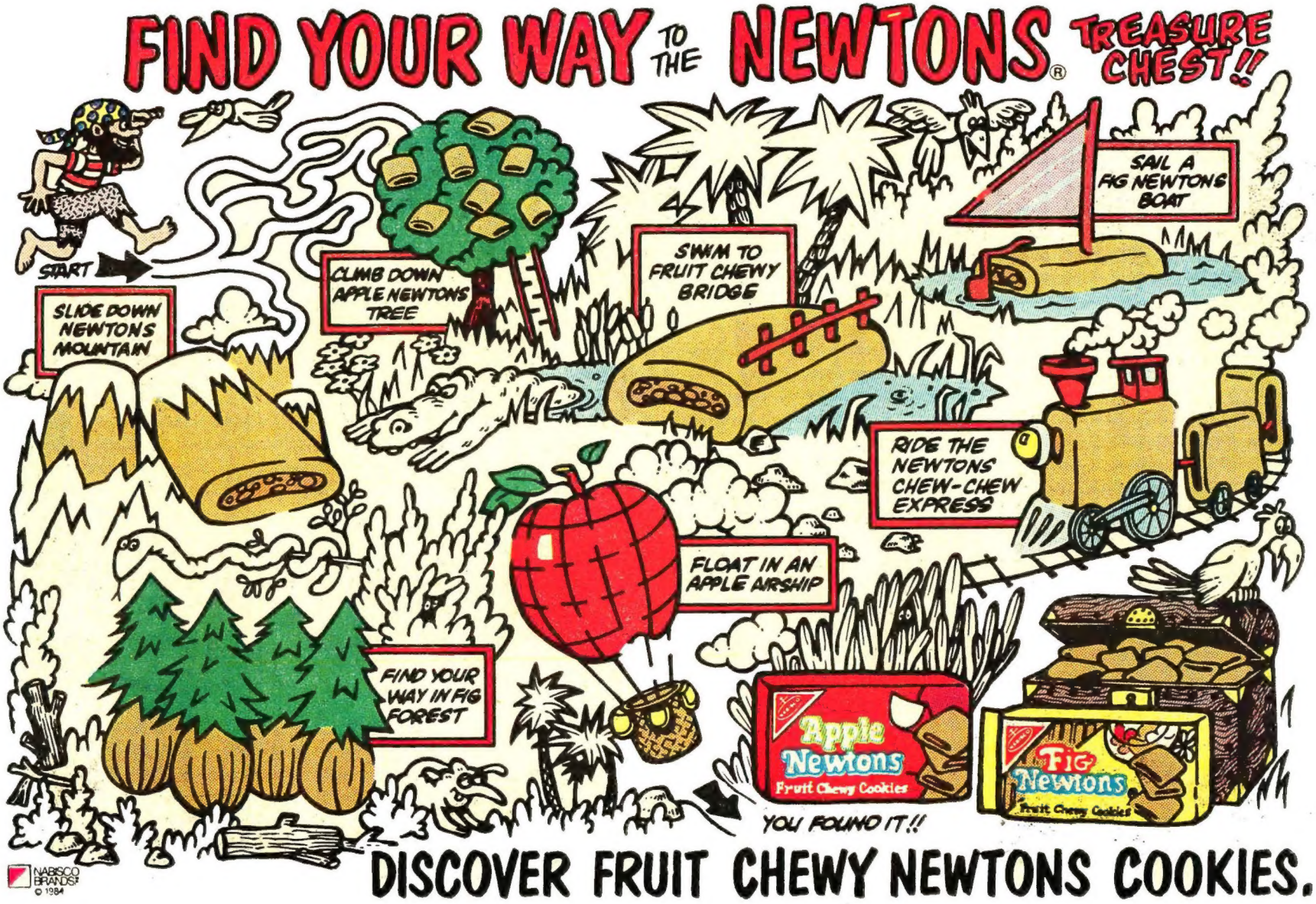
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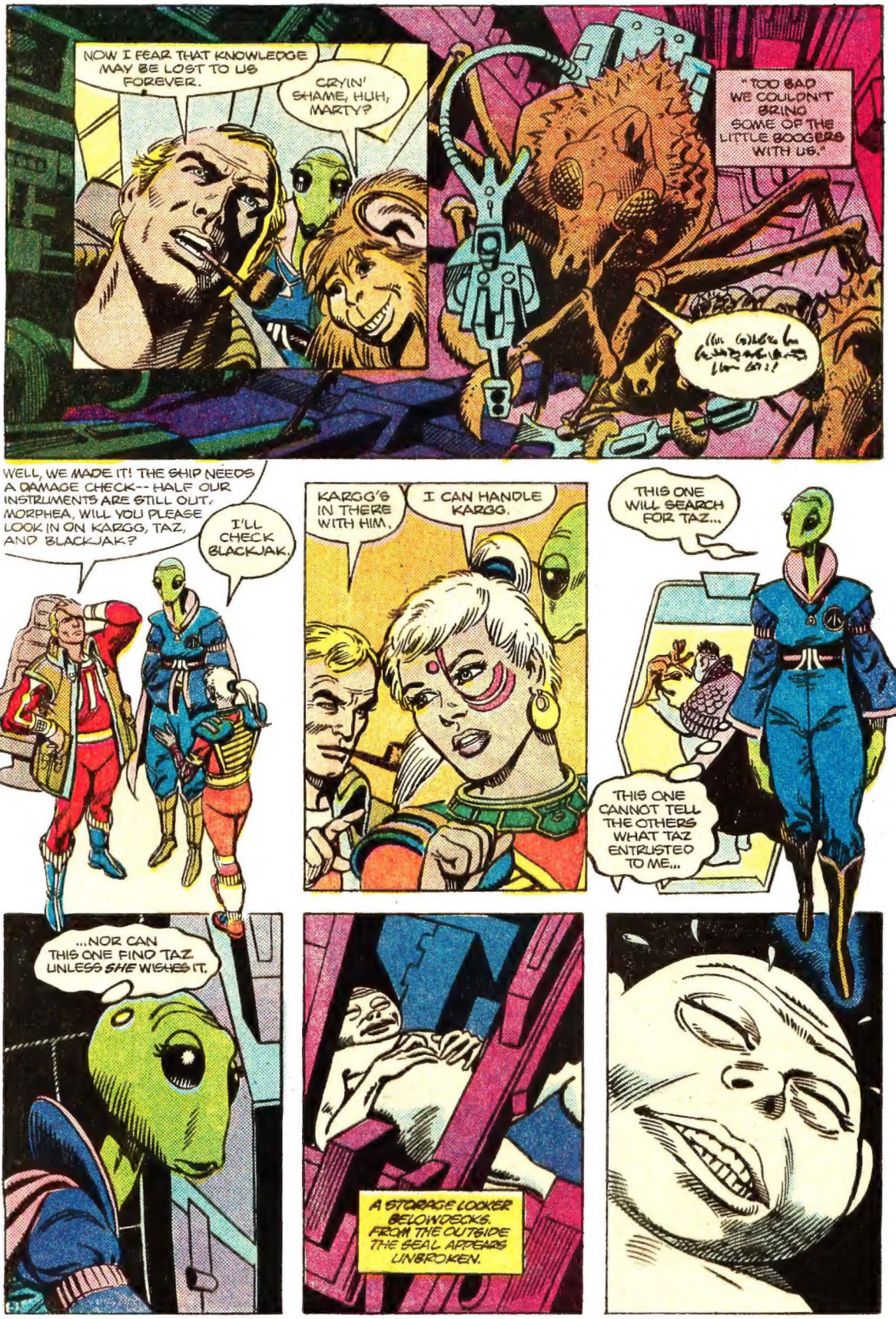
NOW I FEAR THAT KNOWLEDGE MAY BE LOST TO US FOREVER.
CRYIN' SHAME, HUH, MARTY?
"TOO BAD WE COULDN'T BRING SOME OF THE LITTLE BOOGERS WITH US."
WELL, WE MADE IT! THE SHIP NEEDS A DAMAGE CHECK-- HALF OUR INSTRUMENTS ARE STILL OUT. MORPHEA, WILL YOU PLEASE LOOK IN ON KARGG, TAZ, AND BLACKJAK?
I'LL CHECK BLACKJAK.
KARGG'S IN THERE WITH HIM.
I CAN HANDLE KARGG.
THIS ONE WILL SEARCH FOR TAZ...
THIS ONE CANNOT TELL THE OTHERS WHAT TAZ ENTRUSTED TO ME...
...NOR CAN THIS ONE FIND TAZ UNLESS SHE WISHES IT.
A STORAGE LOCKER BELOWDECKS. FROM THE OUTSIDE THE SEAL APPEARS UNBROKEN.

IN A LOCKED ROOM...
SO, HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
LOUSY.
I FEEL BETTER THAN HIM, BUT I STILL FEEL LOUSY. WHAT DO YOU CARE?
I'VE NEVER STOPPED CARING. I WISH THERE WERE SOME WAY TO MAKE YOU SEE THAT.
SO WHAT IF I DID? WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD IT MAKE? I TRIED TO KILL YOU. WE CAN NEVER GO BACK.
MAYBE. IF...IF...I DON'T KNOW. BUT THANKS, DART.
I WOULDN'T BE HERE IF I DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD BE SAVED.
WHO WANTS TO GO BACK? BUT CAN'T WE LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES? MAYBE WE CAN GO FORWARD...
THAT'S GOOD. AND WHAT ABOUT KARGG? SEE ANY SALVATION WITH HIM IN IT?
NO.
WELL, SEE IF YOU CAN GET ME A DIFFERENT BUNK. HE'S BEGINNING TO GET ON MY NERVES.
I'LL TRY...
6

BLACKJAK'S ONLY CRIME WAS WEAKNESS, BUT WHEN HE WAS WITH ME, THERE WAS NO ONE BRAVER.
THE DARK DESTROYER TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HIS WEAKNESS AFTER OUR SEPARATION AND--
TEMPEST!?
DART... AT LAST...
TEMPEST, WHERE ARE YOU? CAN YOU COME TO ME? WE NEED YOU!
BEING HELD PRISONER AT ATARI HQ...
ATARI???! THEN NEW EARTH STILL EXISTS?
STILL EXISTS? I DON'T GET IT! DART! I'M LOSING YOU...
NO! STAY WITH ME!
TEMPEST...
HE'S ALIVE! AND THAT MAY MEAN--
--IT'S TIME... TO TAKE THIS NEWS TO THE BRIDGE!
7

MARTIN! I JUST MADE MENTAL CONTACT WITH TEMPEST!
WHAT?! ARE YOU SURE?
HEY, GOOD NEWS--AT LAST!
IT WAS REAL, ALL RIGHT. AND IT WAS TEMPEST, BUT HE SEEMED SO FAINT. LIKE HE WAS ILL. AND VERY FAR AWAY.
STILL--THAT'S FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT NEW EARTH EXISTS!
WE MAY YET SEE OUR HOME...
HOME...? YOU TAKE BABE HOME NOW?
NOT YOUR HOME, NUMBNUTZ! THEIR HOME! SHEESH!
STOP TEASING BABE OR I'LL TWIST YOUR EAR OFF!
OWW! OKAY! CHEEZ! LIGHTEN UP!
WHAT'S ALL THE EXCITEMENT, ANYWAY? IF WE EVER DO GET BACK, MY BROTHER'S JUST GOING TO HAVE US ALL ARRESTED.
THAT'S TOUGH. WE STILL WANT TO GO HOME.
QUIT SNIVELING AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, FOR ONCE.
DART, KEEP TRYING TO CONTACT TEMPEST, IF WE CAN GET HIM TO PHASE HERE...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO SPELL IT OUT...

CONTINUED ON 2ND PAGE FOLLOWING

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"WE CAN TRIANGULATE OUR POSITION AND FIND OUR WAY HOME..
"...PROVIDING THE 'RIPPLE EFFECT' HASN'T SCREWED UP OUR INSTRUMENTS TOO BADLY."
THIS ONE HAS TRAVERSED THE SHIP AND FOUND NO SIGN OF TAZ...WHICH CAN MEAN MANY THINGS. PRIMARILY, TAZ DOES NOT WISH TO BE FOUND.
THIS ONE UNDERSTANDS.
BUT SOON THE REST OF THE CREW WILL HAVE TO KNOW.
WHILE HIDDEN IN A LOCKER, TAZ STRUGGLES TO CONTROL HER PAIN...
...THE PAIN OF CHILDBIRTH.
OUTSIDE IN THE CORRIDOR THROUGH WHICH MORPHEA PASSED SECONDS AGO...
SKUTTLE SKUTTLE SKUTTL

THEY SWEEP BY THE LOCKER CONTAINING TAZ...
SKUTTLE
SKRITCH
ZZZAP
CLINK
NAP!
POP

OH MY GOD...
NOW WHAT?
MORPH'A! MORPH'A! WE GO HOME SOON!
THE SENSORS JUST KICKED IN FOR C DECK-- LOOK AT THIS, WE'VE GOT A DOZEN UNINVITED GUESTS ON BOARD.
BUT WHO--?
ANTS!
SKRITCH SKRITCH SKRITCH SKRITCH
NO! NO, THANK YOU, BABE. IF YOU START SMASHING THEM IN HERE, THERE GOES THE SHIP.
ANTS? WANT BABE TO...
MARTIN, WE BETTER DO SOMETHING QUICKLY THEY'RE HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE BRIDGE!
SKRITCHSKRITCHSKRITCH
WHAT'S THAT NOISE? WHAT IS IT?!
SHUT UP AND GET READY TO FIGHT, YOU COWARD!
DON'T FIRE THAT LASER IN HERE!
SKRITCHSKRITCHSKRITCH
SKRITCH SKRITCH
SKRITCH

BAMM
BAD ITCHY-CRAWLIES!
NO BLASTERS! USE KNIVES!
ZAPPO
TRY TELLING THEM THAT!
YOU TRY I'M LEAVING!
WHEN I GET MY HANDS ON THAT MISERABLE COWARD...
SAVE YOUR ANGER FOR THE ANTS, RIDENT! TRY TO JAM THOSE BACK-MOUNTED CANNON!

I'M GONE... HUH?!
CHOK
MAGICALLY POURING OUT OF THE BULKHEADS, THE TAZLINGS ATTACK THE INVADING ANTS WITH A BIZARRE VARIETY OF JURY-RIGGED WEAPONS...
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
CRAK
THUD
HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE

WHAT ARE THEY?
LOOK CLOSELY. DON'T YOU RECOGNIZE THEM? THEY'RE THE SAME SPECIES AS TAZ.
THEY ARE TAZ'S CHILDREN.
BABIES!
HOLY--! NO WONDER HE...SHE KEPT HAVING FAINTING SPELLS... SHE WAS PREGNANT!
AND HERE IS THE PROUD MOTHER.
GOOD! GOOD! GOOD!
YOU MEAN... MORE LIKE TAZ?
WHAT'S THE MATTER, PAKRAT? AFRAID OF THE COMPETITION?
NAW--JUST ONE TOO MANY UGLY ALIEN CRITTERS!
DON'T LET MY BROTHER'S RUDENESS UPSET YOU. MAY I BE THE FIRST TO CONGRATULATE YOU.
THANKS.

LOOK AT THIS MINIATURE BLASTER. THEY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN BORN WITH EXTRAORDINARY ABILITIES.
MARTIN, THIS ONE BELIEVES SHE UNDERSTANDS...THE TAZLINGS ARE BORN WITH RARE INSTINCTIVE ABILITIES--BOTH TECHNICAL AND PHYSICAL--
--IT SEEMS THEY LOSE THIS NATURAL INTELLIGENCE WITH AGE. THEN THEY HAVE TO LEARN IT ALL OVER AGAIN.
YES, MOST ODE [illegible] CORRECT
ADDITIONALLY, THEY HAVE LANGUAGE SKILLS.. THEY CAN COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER. AND SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, THEY MAKE A DECISION TO FIX SOMETHING...
...WHICH LEADS TO AN INTERESTING QUESTION. WHO DECIDES WHAT GETS FIXED?
AND WHAT IF THEY FIX SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T NEED FIXING?
HEY! WHERE'D THEY GO?
I HAVE A FEELING WE'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH. MORPHEA--YOU WANT TO FOLLOW?
VERY WELL, MARTIN.

WELL?
HOW'D YOU GET IN HERE, ANYWAY? WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT? YOU KNOW, ALL THE USUAL QUESTIONS.
HEY, WATCH IT, SHORT STUFF! THAT TICKLES!
HEY!
THEY'RE IN WITH BLACKJAK AND KARGG, BUT THE DOOR WON'T OPEN.
THIS ONE PRAYS THEY ARE DOING NO HARM...
TO BE CONTINUED...

DC Comics Inc.
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First, a little catching up is in order. What with all the strange mail we've been receiving (remember last issue's unauthorized Mike Baron bio?) we've hardly had a chance to thank all the folks who, at a moment's notice, pitched in to produce the monthly piece of entertainment you now hold in your hands.

First, thanks to Ed Barreto, who, at a moment's notice, not only penciled last issue, but inked it as well. Barreto fans will be happy to know that Ed is recuperating nicely, and will return to penciling these pages next issue.

Second, thanks to Ed Hannigan, who, at a moment's notice, accepted the assignment of penciling this issue's main feature. Ed completed the job about fifteen minutes before embarking on a two-week cruise to somewhere south of New York City. To avoid having to do art corrections, he declined to tell us exactly where he was headed, but judging from the job he handed in, we wouldn't have bothered him anyway.

Third, thanks to Ricardo Villagran, who, at a moment's notice (this is getting ridiculous, no?), managed to ink this issue in his usual splendid fashion.

Fourth, thanks to Paris Cullins, who—well, you get the point—turned in this issue's wild Taz spotlight cover.

And finally, thanks to José Luis Garcia Lopez, who managed to stay level-headed through all this deadline madness and ink said cover.

And while we're on the subject, thanks to Mike Baron, Bob "Letters" Lappan, and Tom "nothing rhymes with Z" Ziuko for doing the things they do every month—better than anyone else in the comic book biz.

Whew!

Now, where were we? Oh, yes...letters...As you'll see in the missives that follow, ATARI FORCE fans' letters were evenly split on issue #12—half of you addressed the question of the secret of the Dark Destroyer, while the other half commented on José Luis Garcia Lopez' departure from these pages. We've all had a chance to see what Ed Barreto can do, and *our* faith in his talents has been confirmed—next month we'll find out how *you* feel about his renditions of the AF crew. But for now...

*****

Dear Atari People,

Truth to tell, I've never given much thought to the identity of the Dark Destroyer. First of all, I figured that there was a chance that he would turn out to be one of those characters who would remain forever anonymous (like a certain letter writer I could mention). And if he did have a revealable identity, then I figured you'd tell us in your own sweet time—and no sense in getting overwrought in the interim. Besides, his identity didn't seem to be particularly relevant to his importance in the series; rather it was what he stood for.

That said, I must also say that #12's revelation that DD is (or at least appears to be) Martin Champion, in some sense, did not come as a great surprise to me. In science fiction, and indeed in literature in general, a classic theme is to have the hero battle the personification of himself or of his opposite—or indeed of both combined. (For example, DD could be "both" in that he looks like Martin and presumably has some of his traits, yet is evil.) This approach brings the hero to a supreme test of his abilities and at the same time forces him to come to terms with his true self and thus allows also for great character revelation. From the start, Martin's quest for the Dark Destroyer has been in the classic mode: a long, obsessive, solo, ridiculed quest to root out the ultimate evil. Some would say that this situation is only an analogy of life: We search all our lives for truth and meaning, yet in the end we find only ourselves—in that we must come to terms with ourselves before we can seek the greater answer.

Thus, next issue clearly has classic potential. Will Martin find himself at the heart of evil personified?

Yours truly,
T.M. Maple
Box 1272, Station B
Weston ONT M9L2R9

(As usual, T.M., your observations are wise and well put. But we hope that by now you've seen that the Dark Destroyer's true identity was relevant to the story, because it revealed the magnitude of the Destroyer's lust for revenge. That he would go to all this trouble, that he would overlook countless other opportunities to destroy Champion, that he would wait for the precise moment when Martin was totally and absolutely humiliated and broken before attempting to kill him, that he would make Martin witness the destruction of an entire universe before dealing the death blow—this speaks much of the Destroyer's character. And we'll be learning more of the Destroyer's colossal hatred in issues to come—don't miss 'em, okay?)

Dear Andy,

There was an old taboo in show business about working with children; you just didn't do it because no matter how damn good you were, the kids always stole the show! And that's exactly what you did editorially with issue #12 of AF. I realize circumstances did not allow for much flexibility in the matter, but still look at what happened.

In the big unveiling issue wherein devoted fans at long last learn the Dark Destroyer's secret identity, you go and tell us José Luis Garcia Lopez is leaving! No offense, Andy, but that second revelation somehow had the effect of dampening the first drastically.

There's one other truism from show biz that says never, ever go on after the main act! I wouldn't want to be in Eduardo Barreto's shoes for nothing! Yet his desire to accept the assignment shows a whole lot of guts. I've seen his work also and regrettably don't as yet agree with your high estimations of it. But...that willingness to step in is really admirable. Guess I will just have to give the kid a chance.

In the meantime, so long, José, we will most certainly miss you. One just wishes Mr. Garcia Lopez and the rest of the powers at National would have equal consideration for AF as they do the TITANS. Then perhaps Barreto could have gone there and José stayed where he belongs.

Ron Fortier
PO Box 265
Somersworth, NH 03878

(Now, now, Ron—no sour grapes! We've seen José's first two issues of TEEN TITANS—available soon at your local comic shop—and we can say that it's some of the best he's ever done in comics. If you loved José's work on ATARI FORCE, you'll love it on the TITANS too—and remember that there are thousands of Garcia Lopez fans out there that are anxiously awaiting the opportunity to see José's super-hero work—for them, TITANS is the thing they've been clamoring for. Which all goes to show you, you can't please everybody—but we keep trying.

And, yes, we agree that Ed Barreto had a tough spot to fill—but his respect and love for José's work helped pull him through, and we think he's doing just fine with the FORCE now.)

*****

CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING

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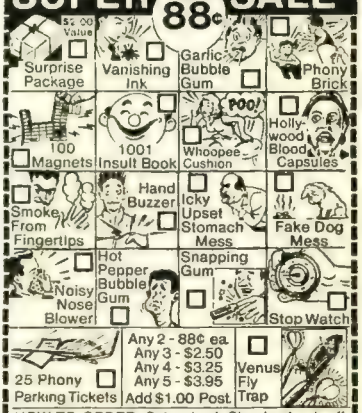

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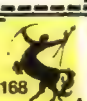

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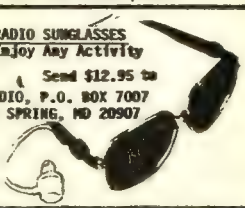

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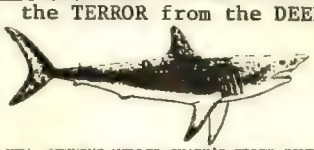

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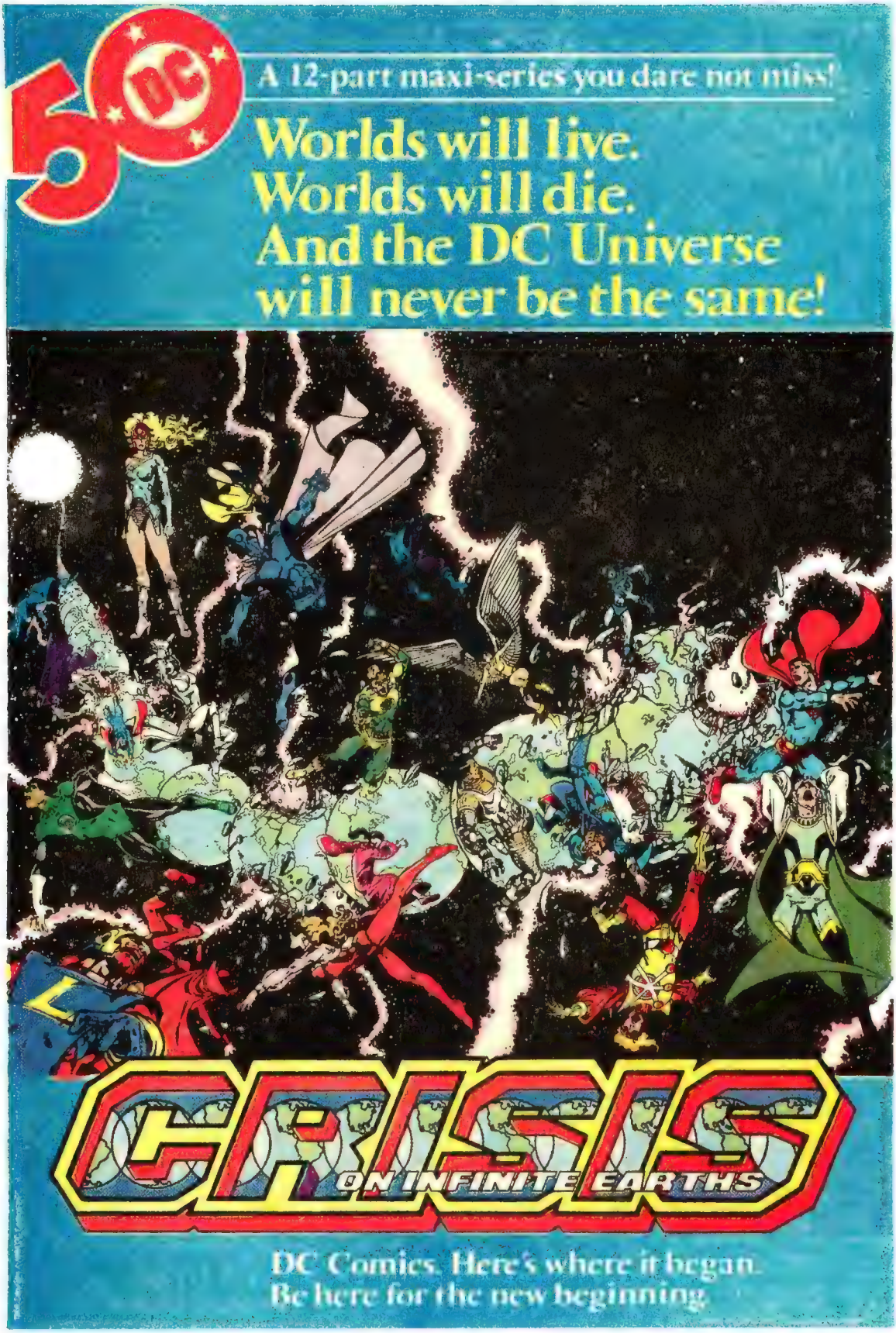
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CRISIS
ON INFINITE EARTHS
DC Comics. Here's where it began.
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Dear DC,

For ATARI FORCE, and its creators, this is a good time. The book is at its high point since its inception, the stories are simply marvelous, and the artwork mirrors that. There's all sorts of things going on: the Dark Destroyer, the betrayal of Blackjak, Christopher Champion's problems with the law, and more of the characters are developing with each passing issue. This is a darn good book, that's for sure!

Now we have the heart of ATARI FORCE, and incidentally, one of the very best illustrators in the field, moving over for a stint on the TEEN TITANS. Well, I don't particularly mind, and I guess my reasons are as follows:

It will only be a temporary move, then José will be back to work on ATARI FORCE. As much as I love George Pérez' work on the TITANS, José's classically drawn figures will be an interesting sight...he does a good Dick Grayson too!

There's also a replacement, very capable Eduardo Barreto, perhaps one of comicdom's hottest new artists. Ironically, I have followed Eduardo through his few assignments here and there in the DC universe, and I always noted the strong resemblance his work bears to José's. Now we learn that José is an influence, and again ironically, the student will pick up where the teacher left off, or so to speak. Welcome aboard, Eduardo, after your recent shot over in DC PRESENTS, I know you'll do more than a fair job! And for the book in general, indeed, the future looks bright...very bright.

Mark Waldman
9639 Amigo Avenue
Northridge, CA 91324

(Thanks, Mark. Ed appreciated your encouraging comments, which arrived at our offices just as he was ready to begin his first ATARI FORCE job. It's reassuring to know that there are many fans out there who are willing to give new—and in Ed's case, formidable—talent a fair shake before passing judgment. If not for fans like that, many of today's top talents could not have had the chance to grow into the positions of prominence they hold in the business today. You've only to look at some of the current fan favorites' first comic assignments to see that, without encouragement and patience, they might be insurance salesmen—or worse—today. We don't mean to get preachy, but we really *do mean it!!)*

* * * * *

Hey, People:

WHAT DO YOU HAVE AGAINST TEMPEST?!?! I mean, come on, you guys...within 12 issues you've had the kid dumped by his girl, beaten up, tortured, shot, betrayed, drugged, and thrown in jail, not to mention the fact that his father has hated him since birth! The only other person in comics with this kind of luck is Lightning Lad. If you don't ease up on Tempest, he won't make it through another year.

Aside from this injustice, this is a surprisingly good book you have here. Don't feel too bad if the book is taking a while to catch on. Face it, the name ATARI FORCE smacks of commercialism. People are scared off by it. They'll come around. I'll be sorry to see José go, even if it is only for a little while. Once he comes off the TITANS, chain him to this book if you have to!

Thanks for listening,
Donna Gregory
Morganville, NJ

(Somehow, we don't think chains will be necessary, Donna. And don't worry too much about Tempest either. Although his troubles are far from over, as you can see, he's managed to survive the destruction of a universe—next to which, being tortured, shot, betrayed, drugged, and thrown in jail, and practically anything else you can think of, is definitely *small potatoes!!)*

* * * * *

Dear Messrs. Helfer, Conway, and Garcia Lopez,

"Thank you!" to all who are involved in the making of ATARI FORCE. I had quit reading comics for four years, but now AF is one of the few that I eagerly await each month. It is the most consistently well-written and well-drawn comic I know of.

So, the Dark Destroyer is (an apparently younger) Martin Champion. How did that happen? It obviously had something to do with the Multiverse's intricacies, but...(Hey, Destroyer! Your karma ran over my dogma!) Ah-hem. Babe is definitely getting larger. I enjoy his (her?) naïveté, but the baby-talk is getting wearisome. Hurrah for Pakrat, who gave Kargg a much-deserved kick in the head (p. 14)! Please incorporate Taz more into the group. He needs to learn to speak English (or another mode of communicating) to live up to his potential. Hugs and kisses to Dart!

Bob Smith's inking in issue 12 was the best I've seen him do for AF. His work has a nice sense of structure and clarity. I'm looking forward to his collabortion with Eduardo Barreto, although I will certainly miss José's work during his absence. Meanwhile, I'll be haunting the local comix shop, on the lookout for ATARI FORCE #13!

Sincerely,
Gary Heise
110 Vreeland Ave.
Bergenfield, NJ 07621

(As you have seen by now, we opted to return to Ricardo Villagran's inks to help retain some of the original feel of the ATARI FORCE, so while you won't be seeing Bob Smith's inks over Ed's pencils, we think you'll be satisfied nonetheless. As for the characters you mentioned—yes, Babe is getting larger, and a bit surlier *to boot! And, yes, we've got alot in store for you as far as Taz is concerned—starting this very issue!)*

Dear Andy,

First, I thought the theory went that a kilogram of anti-matter was needed to destroy a kilogram of matter. So the Dark Destroyer's bomb would destroy only an equal amount of mass as the anti-matter inside it.

Second, a back-up feature in an already too short 23-page comic seems dishonest. However, I like Keith Giffen, so you'll hear no complaint from me.

Third, I think the fact that José Lopez would jump from ATARI FORCE to TEEN TITANS stinks. It's good to know where his priorities do not lie. It's not like I think that Lopez is the greatest thing since overhead valves. It's just that (and you can call me old-fashioned if you like) I believe in commitment. Claremont has been with the X-MEN 10 years. Good, bad, or sleep-inducing, you always know who to blame or thank.

In closing I would like to add that I think it's great that these somewhat complicated stories attract younger readers. Just goes to show that your book has a little magic that touches everyone.

Godspeed,
Jim Chapman
Ville Platte, LA

(First: Yes, but a kilogram of radioactive anti-matter breeds, leading to the anti-matter equivalent of a nuclear reaction. Second: We make our lead features sixteen pages to insure their quality—the talents involved simply cannot do 23 pages every month. And ATARI FORCE's back-up features are far from mere filler—they include work from some of the business's top talents. And with Keith Giffen, Klaus Janson, Mike Chen, and Marshall Rogers among them, we can hardly *be accused of dishonesty! Third: It's not a question of priorities—José would not have taken this brief sabbatical if he was not convinced that the ATARI FORCE was in good hands. His commitment is still present on every cover of this magazine, not to mention his constant—and uncredited—input in story development. And Fourth: Thanks for your letter.)*

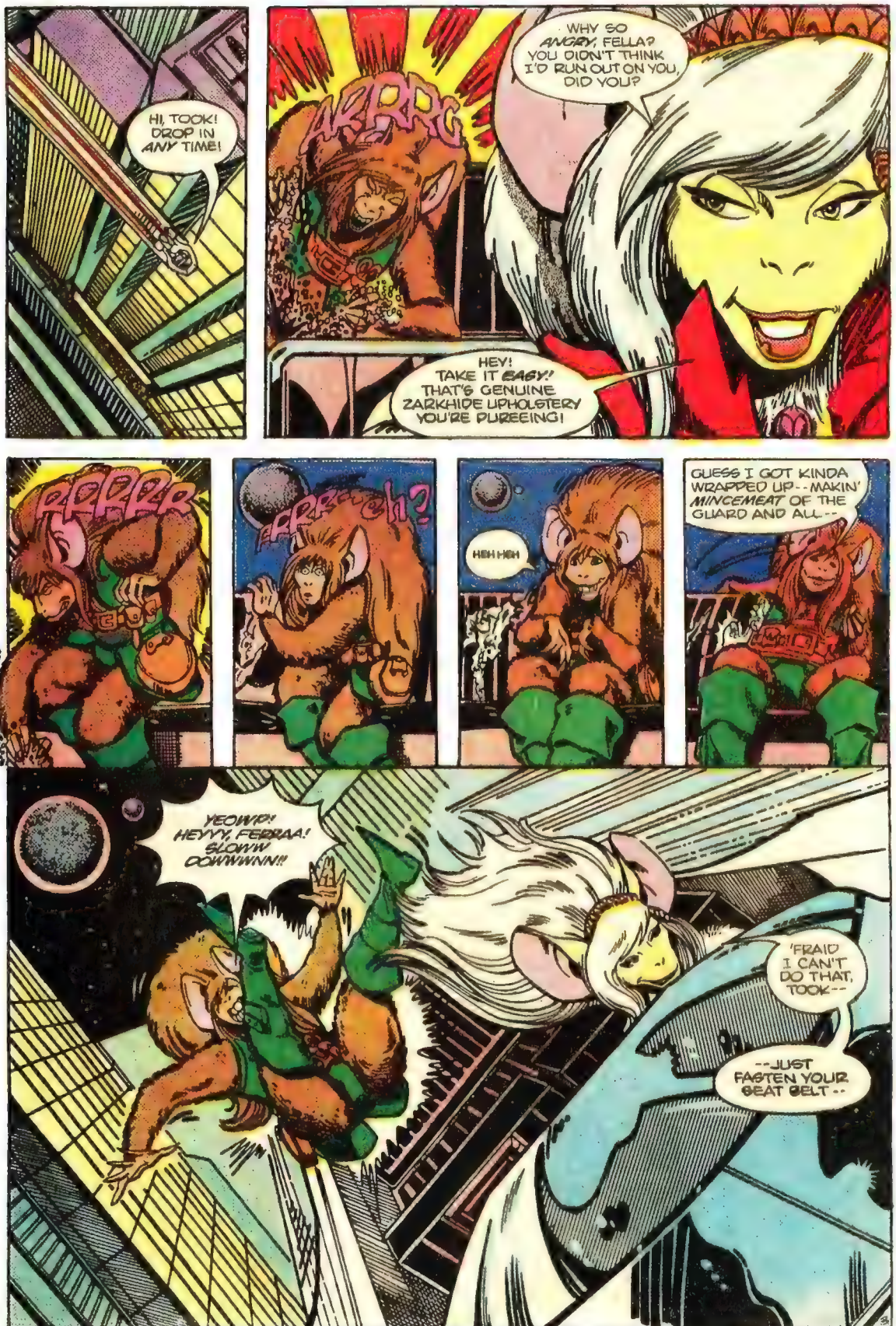
* * * * *

NEXT ISSUE: Well, we guess you're wondering —what are the Tazlings doing with Blackjak? Is this just deserts—or something more? Find out next issue! Also, Morphee takes a journey into the mind of someone *aboard Scanner One—and discovers something lurking within that has to be* seen *to be believed! And, lest we forget, the conclusion of the three-part Pakrat solo mini-epic, a story called "RATS LIKE US," illustrated by Mike Chen and Joe DelBeato, and written by*

—ANDY HELFER

"TRY TO FOLLOW ME--I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH ABOUT THIS PART.
"I TRIED TO STEAL SOME JEWELS FROM A TOWER, BUT A GAL NAMED FERRA BEAT ME TO 'EM--
"--AND LEFT ME TO TAKE THE RAP
"I WAS TRAPPED.
"CORNERED.
"AND WHEN I GET THAT WAY...
"WELL, I, UH--GET A LITTLE CRAZY.
AAEEEEEARRRR
PATPAD!
WRITER/EDITOR
ANDY HELFER
PENCILS
MIKE CHEN
INKS
JOE DELBEATO
LETTERS
BOB LAPPAN
COLORS
CARL GAFFORD
"THE SECURITY GUARD WAS AS GOOD AS SHREDDED WHEAT...
G-1746

"...OR SO I THOUGHT!"
FZZZZ
HEH HEH! YOUSE A PERKY LITTLE MARKIAN, AIN'CHA?
TIME FOR YOU TO CALM DOWN A BIT--
--LIGHTS OUT!
OH, NO! I MEANT TO TOSS 'IM AGAINST THE WALL--
--NOT OUT THE WINDOW!
I MOIDERED THE LITTLE FELLA!
RRRRAAAAAAAAGGGGHHH
GOOH...!
BLOP!
FZZZ
2


HI, TOOK! DROP IN ANY TIME!
AKRRG
WHY SO ANGRY, FELLA? YOU DIDN'T THINK I'D RUN OUT ON YOU, DID YOU?
HEY! TAKE IT EASY! THAT'S GENUINE ZARKHIDE UPHOLSTERY YOU'RE PUREEING!
RRRRR
FRRR

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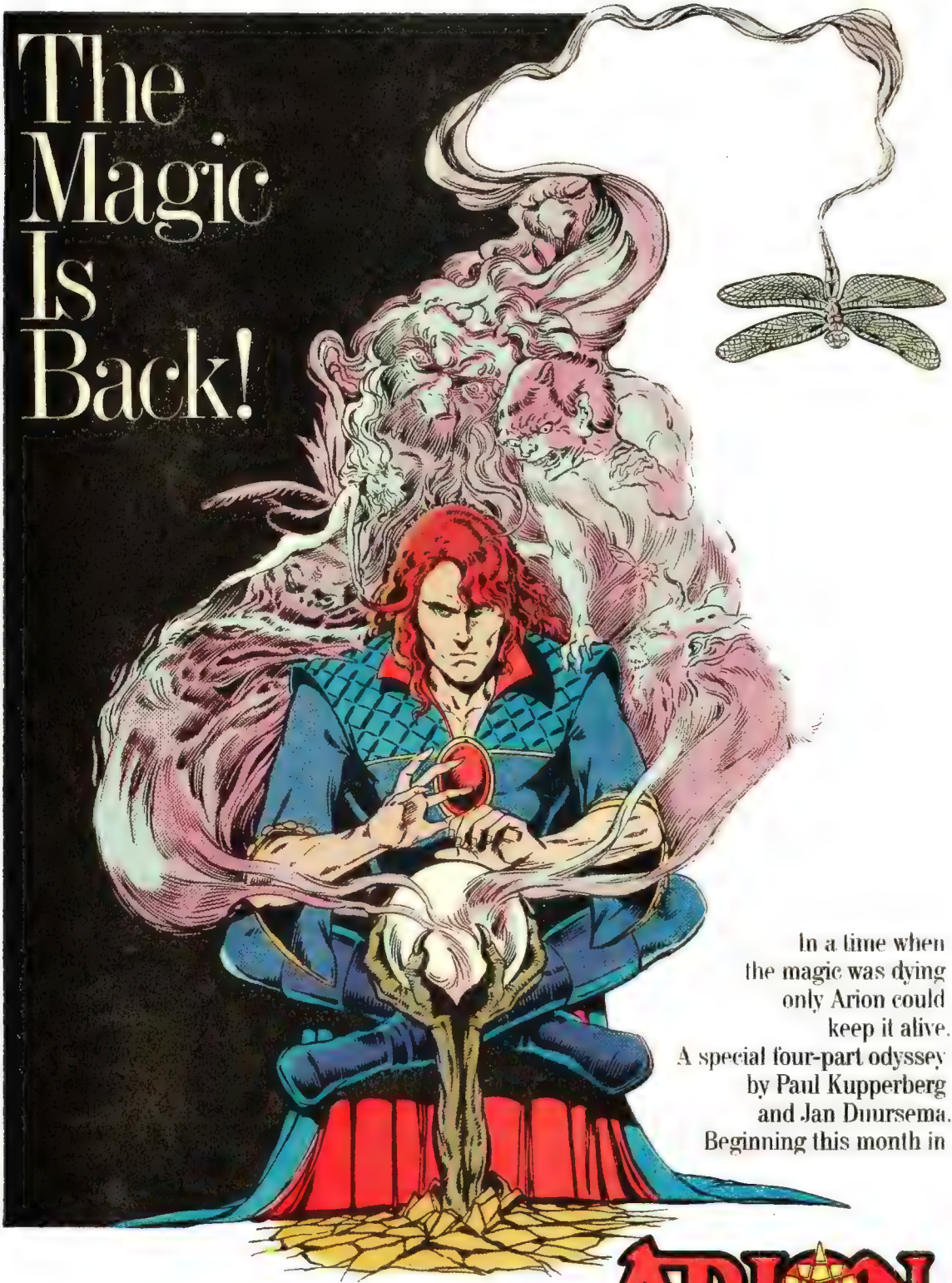

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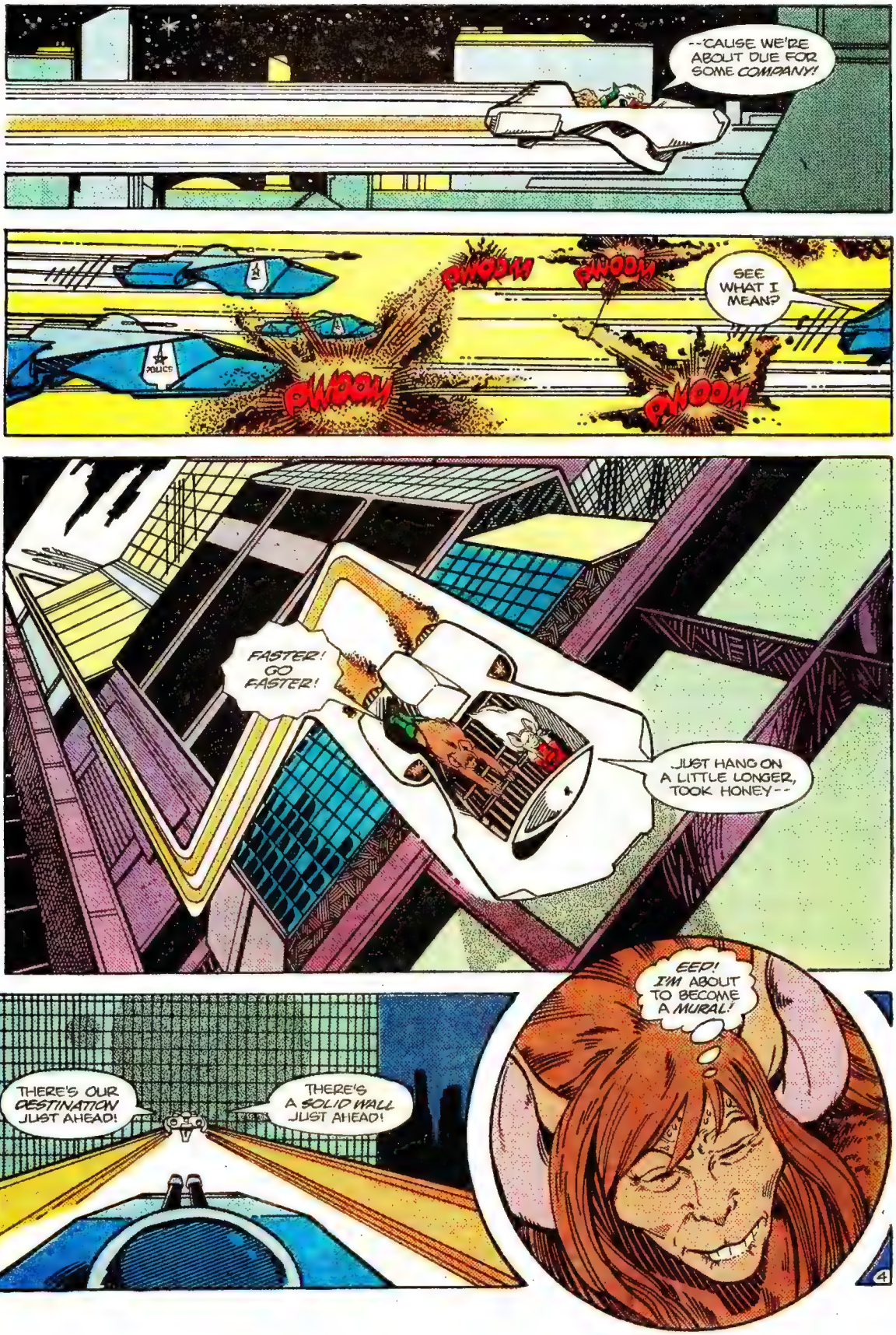
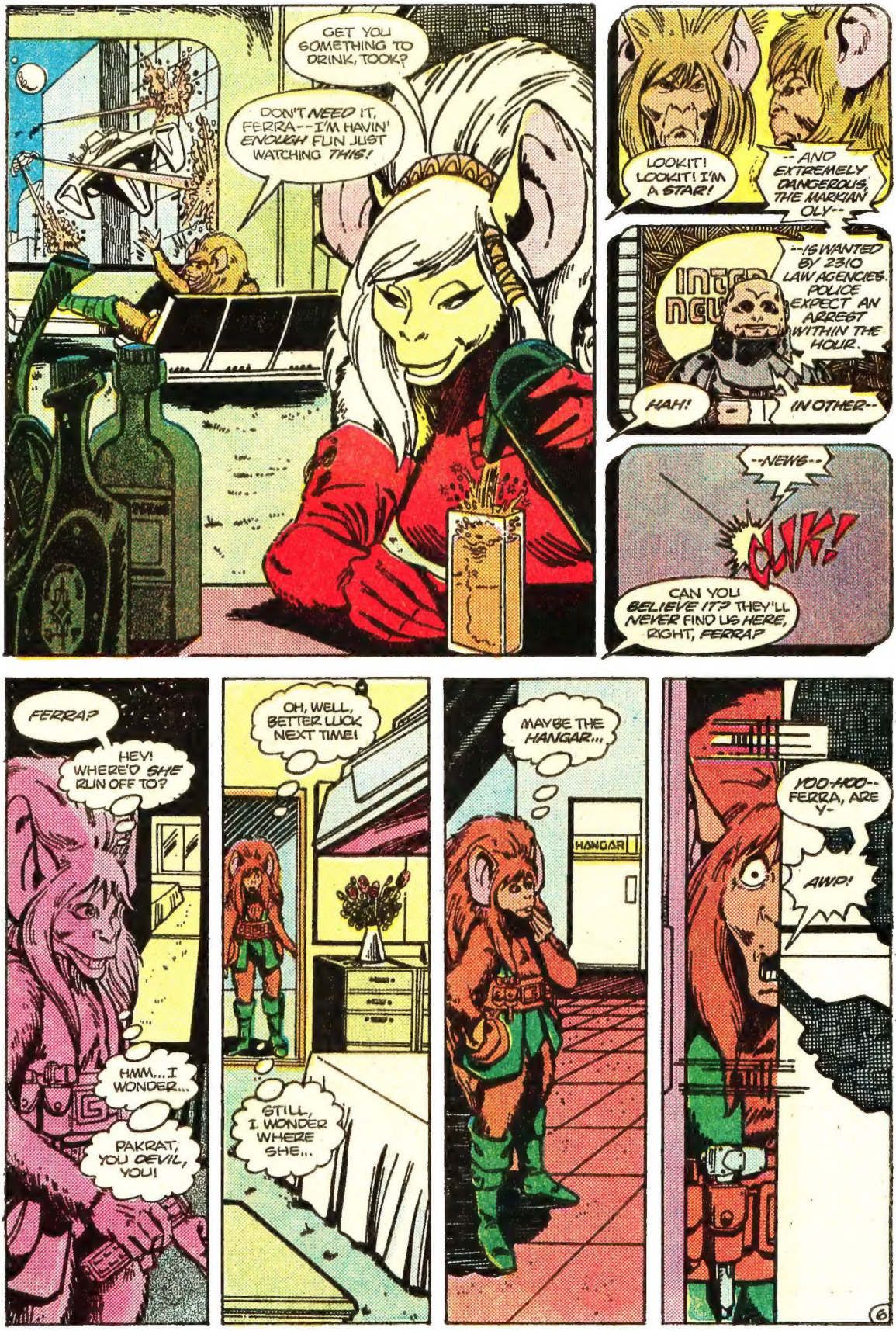
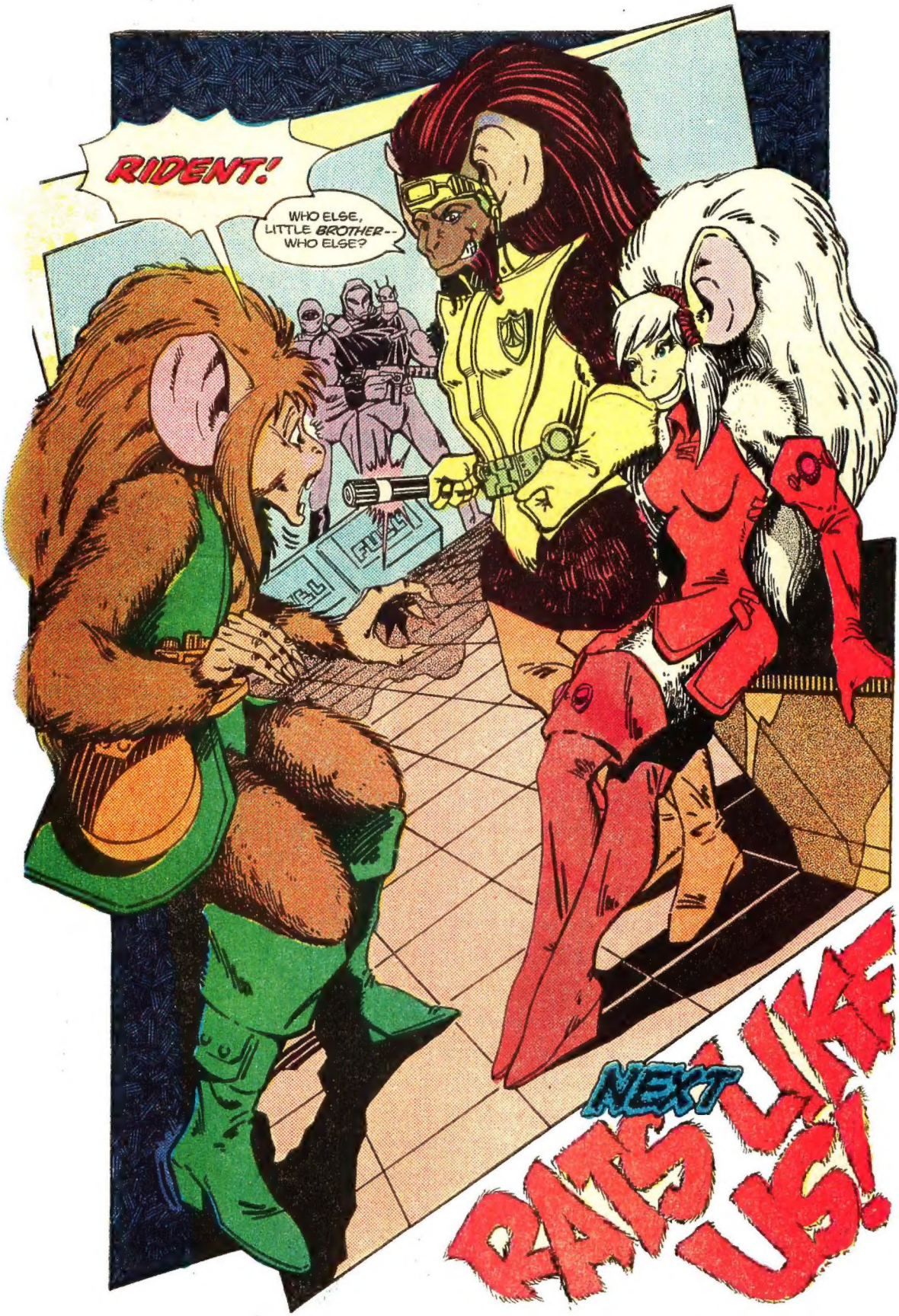

--CAUSE WE'RE ABOUT DUE FOR SOME COMPANY!
POLICE
KWOOM
KWOOM
KWOOM
KWOOM
SEE WHAT I MEAN?
FASTER! GO FASTER!
JUST HANG ON A LITTLE LONGER, TOOK HONEY--
THERE'S OUR DESTINATION JUST AHEAD!
THERE'S A SOLID WALL JUST AHEAD!
EEP! I'M ABOUT TO BECOME A MURAL!

GOING UP!!!
HEY, TOOK! ISN'T THIS FUN?!
URP! THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT I'D CALL IT
AW, TOOK, YOU'RE SUCH A POOP!
LISTEN-- WE LOST THOSE PALACE GUARDS--
--I VOTE WE TRY IT AGAIN!
NO! NO! N--
--OOO. A DOOR IN THE SIDE OF A 'SCRAPER.
AND IN MOMENTS...
NOW I'VE SEEN EVERYTHING.
NOT YET, HONEY.
THIS IS DADDY'S LITTLE HOME-AWAY-FROM-HOME. HE USES IT TO...UH... ENTERTAIN OUT-OF-TOWN GUESTS. I HAVE THE KEYS.
SWITCH ON THE SCREEN, WILLYA, TOOK? TIME FOR THE NEWS!


GET YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK, TOOK?
DON'T NEED IT, FERRA--I'M HAVIN' ENOUGH FUN JUST WATCHING THIS!
LOOKIT! LOOKIT! I'M A STAR!
--AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS, THE MARKIAN OLY--
--IS WANTED BY 2310 LAW AGENCIES. POLICE EXPECT AN ARREST WITHIN THE HOUR.
HAH!
IN OTHER--
--NEWS--
CLIK!
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? THEY'LL NEVER FIND US HERE, RIGHT, FERRA?
FERRA?
HEY! WHERE'D SHE RUN OFF TO?
HMM... I WONDER...
PAKRAT, YOU DEVIL, YOU!
OH, WELL, BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME!
STILL, I WONDER WHERE SHE...
MAYBE THE HANGAR...
HANGAR
YOO-HOO-- FERRA, ARE Y-
AWP!
6


RIDENT!
WHO ELSE, LITTLE BROTHER-- WHO ELSE?
NEXT
BAD LIKE US!

MEANWHILE...

Have you seen the **SWAMP THING ANNUAL?** How about **SPANNER'S GALAXY, CONQUEROR OF THE BARREN EARTH, JONNI THUNDER,** or **ROBOTECH DEFENDERS?** Or a book that's near and dear to my heart, **SUPERMAN: THE SECRET YEARS?** You have?

Notice something **different** about them? How more vibrant the color seems? Must be the paper, right? Wrong! It's the same 37-pound Mando paper we've been using. What you're seeing in these books is the work of the new printing press just recently "launched" by Spartan Printing Company: the Flexographic press.

What the folks at Sparta have done (and those of you who follow Dick's **Meanwhile** columns regularly will remember a mention of this a few months back) is offer flexography as an alternative to the "normal" letterpress printing **and** the much higher-price offset printing. As soon as they mentioned it to us at DC, we expressed an interest in being the first to utilize the press.

A few weeks ago they called and said they were ready. We offered up our mini-series (and added some specials a short time after) and a day later yours truly was winging my way west to watch **SPANNER'S GALAXY** #1 run. There were glitches in the system and some copies had to be done on the letterpress to meet shipping deadlines, but I was so pleased with the look of the book that I came back with a glowing report.

As I write this, I'm sitting on a plane on my way back from watching the **SWAMP THING ANNUAL** run. The Sparta people have worked out almost all the problems and this book looks really great. "But we're not satisfied yet," says Dick Hartman, who runs the plant. "We've got more work to do to make it even better!" By the time you read this, they'll have run some more books. (And I'll probably have "commuted" back and forth a couple more times!)

Is it worth it? Flexographic printing will be a more expensive method than letterpress, but I've been told by the folks at the dollars and cents end of the hall that we should be able to hold the 75¢ price on the 32-page books. So, yes, it's definitely worth it to you, the reader.

And it's worth it to me as Production Manager. Why else would I work a full day in the office, spend seven hours flying from New York to St. Louis and then driving 75 miles to Sparta, spend the next day at the printing plant, and then reverse the seven-hour trip to be home just in time (it feels like) to go back to the office again tomorrow? I sure don't do it because I **like** feeling like I've worked a full week in 2 days!

P.S. Hey, Dick: Couldn't we change our slogan from "Where legends live" to "Where production values count"? (How about "Where the Production Manager never goes off duty"?)

Thanks, Bob, I appreciate your taking time out of your hectic schedule to give our readers an update on **FLEXOGRAPHIC,** the new (and better!) printing process made available to us by **WORLD COLOR PRESS.** I mentioned the pending arrival of **FLEXOGRAPHIC** in this column several months back. Glad I didn't lie!

Bob Rozakis is DC's production manager (although at night and on weekends Bob can be found at home, slaving over a hot typewriter, most currently as the author of the hot new mini-series **SUPERMAN: THE SECRET YEARS**). As such he is one of many who toil behind the scenes quietly, professionally, and almost anonymously, working toward the goal I aspired to in a much earlier **MEANWHILE COLUMN** ... of making comics all that they can be. We strive to make improvements in the creativity of our comics, to make them more fun (read **BLUE DEVIL** lately?), better reading (**SWAMP THING!**), better drawn (**CAMELOT** #12 is out as you read this. Try Pat Broderick's **DETECTIVE** stories if you're not near a comics shop ... or **WHO'S WHO!** issue #2 should be on sale now, I think...), and just plain more entertaining! But can our comics ever really be **all** that they can be without better production values? I think not. Most of the good folks here at **DC** feel as I do: If we're to publish comics that have a broader appeal, some aimed at an older, more sophisticated reader, we must improve the look of our comics ... even (especially!) our lowest-priced comics. So we've taken a step in that direction with **FLEXOGRAPHIC,** thanks to our own Bob Rozakis and **WORLD COLOR PRESS**'s letterpress production manager, Bob Craig.

Before you rush off to tell me what you think, let me tell you what I know.

I know:

1) The colors look garish.

2) There are holes or blotches on some of the colors.

3) Many of the colors don't meet the lines they're supposed to go up to, or they go over those lines.

I know...Bugs!

Every new process or technology has bugs. **FLEXOGRAPHIC** is no exception. It needs to be debugged. We've already gone a long way in the debugging process, and by the time you read this, most of the registration problems will have been solved, along with the blotchy colors. The more difficult problem will be retraining our colorists to use more subtle colors and to reduce tonal values by 25%. In the past, a colorist called for 100% red when he or she wanted a color to look like 75% red. Now with **FLEXOGRAPHIC,** what you ask for is what you **get!** Most of us have been using the old system for 30 years or so. It's going to take time to experiment and learn. And we're willing to put in the time, effort, and money to make this printing process more effective—even though at this point in time we're the only publisher doing so, and even though we know that when the system is debugged, other publishers will be able to walk in and take advantage of a superior printing process that we helped make possible by providing the books to print and the manpower to help make it work. We will—maybe by the time you read this—then we'll be another step closer to making comics all that they can be.

Thank You and Good Afternoon.

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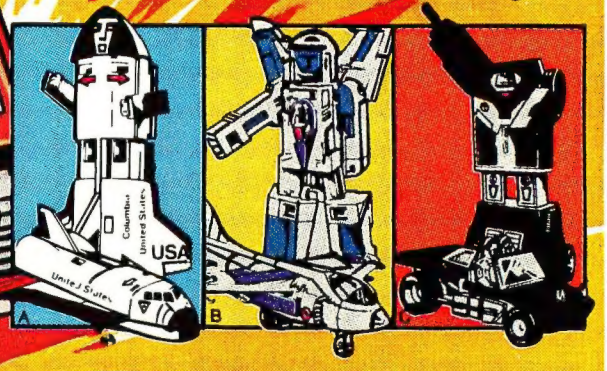

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